

Berks Sand Pit

EPA Region 3

Pennsylvania

Berks County

15 miles northeast of

Reading

near the Village of Huffs

Church

Last Update:

August 2002

EPA ID# PAD980691794

6th Congressional District

Other Names:

Van Elswyck

Property

Current Site Status

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is overseeing the cleanup of the Berks Sand Pit site. The groundwater treatment plant has been fully operational except for brief periods for repair and maintenance. Groundwater is pumped from one extraction well and is treated by air stripping. The contaminants removed by the air stripping are further treated before being released into the air. The treatment facility consistently meets stringent safe drinking water standards. The treated groundwater is piped to an adjacent stream. The EPA collects samples from nearby residential wells annually to insure drinking water remains within acceptable limits. Samples are also collected from the stream and sediments to monitor the effectiveness of the cleanup.

EPA has treated approximately 360 million gallons of contaminated

groundwater at the permanent groundwater treatment facility since March 1993. The plume of contaminated groundwater decreased approximately 75 percent since 1994. Pumping and treatment of the contaminated aquifer continues at a rate of approximately 60 gallons per minute. Extraction and treatment of the groundwater is expected to continue for approximately four more years. In an effort to decrease this time period, EPA conducted a pilot study to determine if the chemicals can be destroyed while in the ground. The results indicated some decrease in contamination. EPA will conduct a second pilot study to further evaluate methods to decrease contamination.

Site Description

The Berks Sand Pit site is a plume of contaminated groundwater which impacted 30 residences in Longswamp Township, Pennsylvania. In January 1982, groundwater contamination was detected in the area by residents, and despite emergency and further investigatory actions by EPA, the source of contamination was never specifically identified. Volatile organic compounds (VOCs), the chemical components of solvents and degreasers, released into the groundwater threaten the bedrock aquifer and the Middle Branch of the Perkiomen Creek. Approximately 100 residents live in the immediate vicinity of the site and are at risk from drinking contaminated groundwater.

Site Responsibility

Cleanup of this site is the responsibility of Federal and State governments, the site owner and parties potentially responsible for site contamination.

NPL Listing History

Our country's most serious, uncontrolled, or abandoned hazardous waste sites can be cleaned using federal money. To be eligible for federal cleanup money, a site must be put on the National Priorities List. This site was proposed to the list on September 8, 1983 and formally added to the list on September 21, 1984.

Threats and Contaminants

Groundwater and the Middle Branch of the Perkiomen Creek are

contaminated with VOCs. Area residents previously at risk from drinking contaminated groundwater were temporarily connected to an upgradient supply well installed by EPA. Residential wells are regularly monitored to insure pollutants remain within safe drinking water levels. Long-term cleanup efforts began with the pumping and treatment of the aquifer in March 1993.

Contaminant descriptions and associated risk factors are available on the Agency for Toxic Substance and Disease Registry, an arm of the CDC, web site at <http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/hazdat.html> 

Cleanup Progress

EPA installed an upgradient drinking water well, holding tank, and water line to four residences in 1983 as an alternate water source. The homeowners maintained the system until contaminant levels in their private wells decreased to acceptable levels.

The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection investigated the site and prepared the feasibility study. In September 1988, EPA issued the final cleanup plan requiring the pumping and treatment of contaminated groundwater. EPA further defined the extent of the contaminated groundwater and in 1990, began constructing the groundwater extraction wells and associated monitoring wells. Design of the groundwater treatment plant began in 1990 and was completed in 1991. Construction of the treatment plant began shortly thereafter and the first phase was completed March 1993. Later that year, three additional extraction wells were installed and connected to the treatment system. A public meeting and tour of the completed facility was conducted in October 1993. The system was modified and optimized throughout 1994. Final inspection was conducted in February 1995.

EPA has treated approximately 360 million gallons of contaminated groundwater at the permanent groundwater treatment facility since March 1993. The plume of contaminated groundwater decreased approximately 75 percent between 1994 and 2002. Pumping and treatment of the contaminated aquifer continues at a rate of approximately 2.6 million gallons per month. Extraction and treatment of the groundwater is expected to continue for approximately four

more years.

Contacts

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Detailed public files (Administrative Record) on EPA's actions and decisions for this site can be examined at the following locations:

Longswamp Township Office

1010 Main Street

Mertztown, PA 19539

U.S. EPA Region III

6th Floor Docket Room

1650 Arch Street

Philadelphia, PA 19103

215-814-3157

Please call for an appointment.